CONDENSED ANALYSIS
PART ONE

Introduction :

Psalmody is the song over which a sacred text is articulated. One must not imagine that Biblical psalmody -- which is resurrected from my deciphering process -- is an isolated, strange phenomenon within the context of the period it was produced, about 1000 B.C.

This form of chanted declamation for the worship service was in use
(1) in the temples of Egypt, Sumer, and Babylonia, to only cite the principal nations neighboring Israel. There in these temples psalmody had a dominant role in executing incantations, lamentations, thanksgiving, etc.

The Biblical psalmody only concerns the poetical texts of the Scriptures[1] -- the Psalms, Proverbs, and the greater part of the book of Job. But the Psalms in themselves exemplify psalmody of great art and expression.

Did the structure and form of Hebrew psalmody have any relationship with other psalmodies of that time ? In certain points this is more than probable. The technical basis must have been the same. The interpenetration of civilizations was as great at that epoch as it is today. Archaeology gives us numerous proofs of this.

We will examine the different parts of ancient psalmody as represented by the melodies of the Psalms.

x-x-x-x

a. THE TONAL SCALE EMPLOYED IS DIATONIC

The diatonic scale (seven degrees of steps and half-steps) is the only scale used in Biblical psalmody. "It is the most ancient of all",
(2) stated the greatest theorician of ancient Greece, Aristoxenes of Taranto.

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1. The reader is reminded that the prose texts use a similar, yet different system of notation. Cf. LA MUSIQUE DE LA BIBLE REVELEE

It has as its basis fundamental numerical relationships produced by tonal relationships. The 5th, a relationship of 3:2, when taken in a series of 5ths and placed within the octave span produces :

This diatonic scale is heptatonic (seven degrees), with the 8th being the reproduction of the 1st.

We deliberately sharped the F here, for it is produced this way by the series of 5ths and is not F natural: However, it is F natural that the ear calls for intuitively when the scale begins on C.

The chromatic scale :

But if we pursue this series of degrees deriving from the 3:2 relationship (continuing on from F) we obtain a series of intermediary degrees, quite distinct to the ear (most are a half-step from the others)

This is the chromatic scale of 12 degrees to the octave of which the same
(3) Aristoxenes of Taranto (4th c. B.C.) said "... goes back to the night of time" ! We see that certain degrees assimilate into others, e.g., B ♯ is the end of the series and C is the beginning ; E ♯ which generated F ♯ can be assimilated to F natural which could have produced C, etc.

Without further delay let us state that in Sumer the scale of seven
(4) degrees -- C,D,E,F,G,A,B -- was called the "scale of the seven planets". It symbolized the harmony of the spheres.

The tuning of instruments in Babylonia, Greece and China was based on fundamental numerical relationships.

Certainly there is a tiny difference between E ♯ and F, and B ♯ and C (a difference attested by the numerical relationships) from which derive the various propositions of temperament or tuning going quite far back in time.

the various propositions of temperament or tuning going quite far back in time.

However, the basic relationships are not limited to 3:2 (the 5th). There is 4:3 (the 4th), which is actually the F natural which seems so normal to our ear in the C scale ; 5:4 (major 3rd) ; 6:5 (minor 3rd), and so on until 9:8 (major 2nd) which produces the whole step -- that clear interval between two neighboring degrees.On what relationships should the ideal scale be based ? Greek theoricians hotly debated this.

Nevertheless, in practice, if they had standards for measuring to
(5) relationships (gongs and bells for the Chinese ; sonometer for the Greeks), we imagine the harps and lyres used in the temples and palaces were tuned by ear just like today. A musician senses the perfectness intervals. "The diatonic genre", says Gevaert, "is the manifestation of a general law, the consequence of the physiological make-up of man".

Some musicologists vainly assume the pentatonic scale preceded th diatonic scale : "The ancient Chinese did not ignore the heptatonic
(6) scale which they considered to be the 'seven beginnings', " says Alai Danielou.

It is only in the 4th-3rd centuries B.C. that the Greeks acquired a taste for melodies built on scale intervals less than the half-step
(7) or slightly passing it, which they called "enharmonic". This style was imported from the Middle East by famous musicians. It created a
(8) reactionary nostalgia for the earlier "classical music". It suited wi instruments like the aulos and flute. One simply covered partially th finger hole corresponding to the note. Biblical psalmody was accompanied by stringed instruments, so diatonic and chromatic genres suited thes instruments. It was a simple, noble music.

This historical survey gives us a bird's eye view testifying in favor of the scale revealed by the deciphering key and which avers to have been used, more than any other, by Hebrew composers about 1000 B

x-x-x-x-x

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b. THE MODAL PALETTE OF PSALMODY

The mode, or how it is produced on the tonal scale, is based on varying intervals of the degrees of the scale.

We mentioned earlier that psalmody does not make use of a seven-note scale of consecutive degrees. The first degree of the scale is not the fundamental note. The second degree is the note which exercises its absolute influence over all other degrees of the scale[1].

Using E as our fundamental note, here are the seven degrees of the psalmodic scale :

Notice : the 7th degree of the mode is below the fundamental note, our "tonic". Two degrees are always altered, being the 2nd and 7th. There is no deviation from this principle. These are the characteristics of the psalmodic scale. In fact, this scale previously has "its mode", being the Hypodorian of the ancients, with the 7th degree altered (known as our chromatic minor scale today[2]).

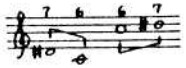
Several psalms make use of this mode just as it is. Its expression is not restricted. It can go from intense sadness (Ps.6) to pure exaltation (Ps.150).

The Lydian scale of the Greeks (our major scale) is also often used :

Like the "minor" mode it suits various sentiments : contemplation (Ps.8), youthful exuberance (Ps.122), tender gratitude (Ps.100). It is the composer's privilege to skillfully employ a mode, serving the text itself, in regards to psalmody (for it is the words which call for a particular mode ; we will return to this point later).

Certain psalms use a mixed mode with the 3rd degree raised but not the 6th. We call this a "major-minor" mode. It is often characterized by quietude (Ps. 133) and suits thanksgiving poetry (Ps.138).

1. The reader is reminded that in ancient Greece the tonic of a mode was one of the central notes of the scale.
2. The chromatic scale, as a modified diatonic scale, is as ancient as the diatonic scale itself. We have the confirmation of this (cf.paragraph a).

Sometimes it is the 4th degree which is "augmented"[1]. We call this a minor with two chromaticisms, for if the 7th degree (D) does not create the augmented interval at the bottom of the scale itself, it does indeed when it is preceded by a melisma involving the 6th degree, either at the bottom or the top of the scale :

This mode is less common than the three others. The majestic psalms use it, e.g., Pss 29,93. Certain other psalms employ it to portray intense sadness, as in Ps.13.

x-x-x-x-x

Several psalms require a change from one mode to another at a particular point within the psalm itself, as in Pss. 24 and 148. Without it the
(10) words would not be highlighted as they should. Aristotle stated : "As soon as the nature of the modes change the listener's impressions change accordingly and follow them".

It is often from one verse to another that the 3rd or the 4th degree must be altered for a similar reason : psalms with the variable 3rd or 4th degree (which we indicate in abbreviations at the beginning of each psalm)[2].

"The modes were not specified in antiquity ; composers did not indicate (...)
accidentals (temporary alterations). The singers had the habit and instinct
(11) to restore them". (A. Machabey)

And what about the enharmonic modes ? Not one is found here. The reader will judge from the study of each psalm : the modes and the "modulations" explained above give their full meaning to each psalm. Simplicity of expression is the rule, and it is totally respected.

x-x-x-x-x

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(12) 1. Aristoxenes of Taranto took into account the "genres mixed together".
2. See Abbreviations at the end of each volume.

Tonal Syntax -

Some people are surprised to learn that such common modes of recent centuries like our major and minor could have been highly esteemed thousands of years ago as well. Consider for a moment the simple characteristics of ancient melody. COnsider for a moment the simple characteristics of ancient melody. We discover that (1) the 1st degree is always the terminal point for each psalm verse ; (2) there are not modulations in the modern sense of the term (being the change from one tonic location to another in the middle of a piece). This practice was unknown to the ancients. (3) Finally, our major and minor modes evolve in various tonalities. This vitalizes music, creating diverse "situations" which is a key element of the architectonic of our classical music today. Nothing of all this existed 3000 years ago ; neither our "harmony" nor the famous "dominant" chord with its "cadence" on the tonic chord. These are modern creations, totally foreignto the ancients.

Tonal Notes of a Mode -

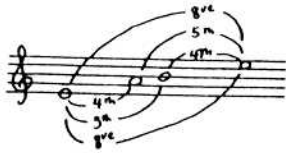
Yet one must not think that we "invented" music, at least, not melody ! It's more the contrary. In the case of melodic expression we have rather regressed !

Like us the composers of yesteryear were aware of the pillar degrees of the tonality ; based on the relationship of the numerical proportions of number and sound. The 1st, 4th and 5th degrees of a mode were always considered as the foundation of tonality. (Hickmann has written an entire book about these pillar degrees !) Along with the 1st degree, the 4th and 5th play important roles. The concluding cadence is on the 1st degree. The temporary or half-cadence is primarily found on the 4th and 5th degrees (the 4th being used more than the 5th).

In fact, the 4th and 5th degrees of the scale are the lower or upper 5ths from the tonic or their inversions, i.e., a 5th down from tonic is the same as a 4th up, and a 5th up from tonic is the same as a 4th down.

This is how the ancient lyres could have had just three or four strings.

"The lyre of Mercury", according to Pythagorian tradition, "was tuned like
) this" (from a quotation of Boece, cited by Gevaert).



Melodic line and tonal expression -

The 1st, 4th and 5th degrees are certainly not the only ones that influence the tonal syntax. The intermediary degrees also contribute. Th links which unite all the degrees of a skillfully constructed melody are so very complex that they cannot be explained, but they can be sensed li a language. It is the language of tonal relationships which produced the wonderful masterpieces of our great composers : symphonies, oratorios and so forth. But it is also the language of simple tonal relationships in t melody which permitted the ancients to illustrate their words and thereb make them clearer, elevating them as they served to express a psalm ! Of course, it helped to have their "modality" which was much more varied than ours.

This then is the ancient "melos" : the song linked instrinsically with the verbal text. We will discover its nuances starting with the nex paragraph.

x-x-x-x-x

c. ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF PSALMODY -

It indicates the punctuation.

Like all other cantillations in antiquity, psalmody played an essential role until just several centuries B.C. Its primary function was to determine the punctuation of the text that it accompanied, since written language at that period of time did not possess our customary punctuation signs like the period, comma, etc.

This sort of melody-words conjugation, which characterized the ancient concept of music, was called melos by the Greeks. Their writings often mention it[1]. "Both the melody and the rhythm and the lexis (the (I5) words) must be taken into consideration so the melos may be perfect", states Aristides.

We only know the ancient melos through the citations of Greek philosophers and theorists ! Having no examples of it, the musicologists generally gave it little importance (no more, indeed, than to the expression attributed to the modes, called ethos that some consider illusory). Howe- (I6) ver, composers of the Renaissance like Marcello and Monteverdi believed in it.

The melodies which resurface through the deciphering of the Bible"s musical signs show what could have been this form of proven art that certain composers have pushed to the extreme. In the psalmody the melody "infiltrates" into the written discourse and animates it, with much greater finesse than our present punctuational system.

The "litanic" form (the same melodic pattern verse after verse) is rare in the Psalms. However, this form was held in esteem in Egypt and Sumer. Where the Psalms make use of it, e.g., Ps.89, it is a sort of insistence which is manifested so that the expression suits various succeeding verses.

In its essence psalmody resolutely stays away from this kind of simplified punctuation. It is valid, of course, but has no deep connection with the sense of the words it accompanies. It determines the punctuation, certainly, but on a higher level it clearly indicates the syntax ; and on

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1. "According to Aristides,music is only a spice for the poetry".Gevaert.

a still higher level the meaning and the expression of the written text[1].

Down through the years translators of the psalms, unaware of this special guide, variously placed their commas, semi-colons, exclamation points, etc. Their punctuations can be totally divergent for the same verse because their bases for punctuating are so fragile. And the spirit of the psalm suffers through it all, to the point of becoming modified.

The exact punctuation and the real syntax resurfaces through this "symbiosis" of music-words. The psalm was expressed through this special combination.

How does this happen ? This is subtle, to the point of passing definition. It is "experienced". It is a question of "understanding". How does our understanding operate ? A composer's understanding suggests ; th of the listener takes in. It is a question of contact. Even without the words the music is still active ! The creators of the psalm melodies pos sessed a highly developed sense (still characterizing composers today). T sensitive listener is attentive, he "lends his ear".

Hierarchy and role of the degrees -

The tonic , etymologically "end" (cf.my book, p.115), call for a stopping point of finality. Without exception each verse in a psalm te minates with this tonic. But there are nuances to this tonic. Some verse may have a very clear ending, e.g., Ps 65:1,2,3,4 ;while another, v.5, suggests an exclamation point by its very melody which accords with the words. In v.6 the ending is indeterminate, momentary, whereas in v.7 it like a consequence -- both musically and poetically speaking. It is the same for v.8, but this time it is very clearly a conclusion. It is all dependent on the written text as well as the melodic line accompanying i where the melody is coming from and how it finally arrives at this degree and all the different degrees that precede it. These subtleties concern the end of every verse : in this sense the melody-word conjuration opera tes as a refined punctuation[2]. But the tonic is there in its right place.

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1. "In the nome (poem sung in the Homeric style) the melodies unceasingly vary, like the words, with the action they interpret ; in the same manner the song must be even more) expressive than the words. "Aristotle, Problems.

2. Ps.8:4, 7 end with a colon despite the concluding sign . These are two random examples.

The 4th degree ( ), etymologically "rest", itself is never conclusive in feeling. It is a simple stopping point, like a semi-colon or a comma . It is the melody which "interprets" it[1].

The 5th degree ( ), etymologically "placed", has a lesser cadential feeling. Often it is just a simple comma as in Ps.19:5.

The other degrees are capable of sometimes indicating a caesura as the melody demands : e.g., the sub-tonic (7th degree) is especially obvious in Ps. 19:7. The 6th degree below the tonic is in Ps. 13:3 ; the 2nd degree in Ps. 8:3 (where it has more cadential strength than the which follows soon after).

x-x-x-x-x

Psalmody reveals the syntax -

The superscriptions of the Psalms. As we begin the subject of syntax, we will first discuss the incipits or superscriptions (subtitles) of the Psalms. Some people think they were added after the Psalms were written. Nearly everywhere the melody shows that the incipits and their psalms are produced by the same musical inspiration. The reader can see this for himself in leafing through these pages of music. The simple words, "Song of degrees", at the beginning of Ps. 130, by their melodic rise which then gives way to a falling off on the first words of the poem : "Out of the depths..." testify that these are undetachable statements. The resultant expression is intense. In the same way in Ps.131:1 the very melody of the poem, "Oh Lord, my heart..." begins on the end of the incipit (2nd degree) which gives that right feeling of waiting on the Lord. These are just two random examples. The longer incipits participate already in the action which follows, e.g., Ps. 52.

The interjections.

There are all kinds of interjections and the melody reveals each particular kind. In Ps.62 where the "akh" (Ah!) are liberally sprinkled, the translator often skips them or simply replaces them by "yes".But these

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1. The stopping on the raisod 4th degree instead of 4 natural, is just as remarkable when it is charged with intensity as in Ps.13:2 where it is used to mark a poignant question. It is obvious here that only experts can select the ritht modes.

are exclamations of disillusionment and pessimism, as the melody brings out ! They are the spice of the poem ; they are half-whispered sighs of "ah!" It's important to know this. In contrast, the "ah!" in Ps. 23:6 is a positive interjection of satisfaction.

The invocations and specially highlighted words.

How often the expression "O God" for Elohim is superfluous in our translations ! How many others would be justified, just when the translator neglects them ! The music is the best interpreter of the poem. There are many words whose expression is quintupled by the music ! E.g., Ps. 27:13 loule, Ps.52:11 Khi tov, Ps. 76:12 schay.

The presumed time of action.

The Hebrew language does not indicate a verbal tense as in our modern languages. A "future" (as a "conditional" or "subjunctive") may be sugge ted by the melody. It is like this in Ps. 4:2b & c where we have chosen the imperative over the past tense (found in several translations). The tension of the melodic line motivates it. There are many other similar cases.

A deep study of the meaning of the text, making use of the music as well as the words, is imperative, now that the 150 Psalms are melodicall restored . Our simple analysis here is just the beginning.

Concerning the expression of words, especially where a particular verse is exquisitely enhanced or delicately contradicted by the music, w will see in greater detail in the rest of the Condensed Analysis.

x-x-x-x-x

d. THE PSALMS WERE ACCOMPANIED

That the Psalms were accompanied is an undeniable fact. The very root of mizmor (psalm in Hebrew) is zmr (zamaru in Sumerian). In Sumer, Assur, Egypt, and with the Hittites, the worship songs were all accompa-
(19) nied as testify the writings and iconography. (A. Parrot)

The primary instruments of worship in the Temple at Jerusalem were the harp (nevel), the lyre (kinnor) and cymbals (I Chron.23:5 ; 25:1). Trumpets were sometimes added and were played by the priests (II Chron. 5:13).

Stringed instruments were rather special and were reserved for worship ceremonies. This was not unique to Israel but was common throughout Mesopotamia. The trumpet was the one instrument common to all religious music.

In Greece the harp and the lyre are noble instruments -- Apollinian. The wind instruments -- Dyonisian -- are the simple flute and the double flute, aulos, fitted occasions of both rejoicing and lamentation.

Israel chose, for its own sacerdotal music from the beginning of David's reign, to use the neghinot or plucked strings. Flutes are not indicated, with the exception of one psalm, Ps.5.[1]

Each Levite-musician played an instrument (I Chron. 5:12). There were 288 singer-instrumentalists plus 120 trumpets comprising this impressive ensemble !

In all the nations cited above there was a great variation in stringed instruments and most likely it was the same in Israel. But in the Temple at Jerusalem they were selected. David himself even created special stringed instruments for worship ! (II Chron. 7:6).

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1. The very unusual penetrating tone of the beginning seems to justify its use.

The instruments mentioned in the subtitles (besides flutes, Ps.5)

Neghinot (haghinot) : "strings", no doubt various kinds, cited in nine psalms. Pss. 4,6,12,54,55,60,61,67,76.

Haghinot hashminit is indicated in Pss.6, 12 and might mean in octaves (from the root "eighth")[1,2]. It is most likely that it is not a question of instruments playing higher than an octave since another designation, al alamot, fits this.

Alamot (root is "young girls" which we translate as "sopranos"). Ps. (21) with its lively and fervent character could very well have used instruments much higher than others (the historical circumstances concern the transporting of the Ark to Jerusalem, I Chron. 15:20).

Ghitit (translators are undecided). Pss.8,81,84 mention ghitit. Their (22) respective characters are : pastoral (Ps.8), quite "demonstrative" (Ps.8 and plaintive (Ps.84) and we might deduce that ghitit has an incisive, delicate sound.

Chochanim (translated as "lily"). From the character of the psalms mentioning it -- full demeanor (Ps.45), desperate supplication (Ps.60), tragic (Ps.80) -- one might think of a stringed instrument like a'cello or a long necked lute as existed in Asia Minor and in Egypt ?

Jedouthoun is most likely a stringed instrument known particularly to Jeduthan (I Chron.25:3), one of the three choir directors appointed by David. It is used in Ps.39 (great sadness), Ps.62 (despair), and Ps.77 (fervent supplication). This instrument must have had a unique timbre like the modern viola, discrete but penetrating.

It is rather tempting to imagine the sound of these particular instruments now that the melodic lines are known, but of course, nothing really can verify them.

What was the accompaniment of the Psalms like ?

Was it all in unison or in octaves ? We do not believe so. Did the intervals of 4ths and 5ths dominate? Melodies with such unusual expressive feeling exclude such rudimentary manner. The richness of the melodies calls for an adequate accompaniment. Of course such accompaniment would be discrete, yet possessing harmonious intervals in relationship to the song.

1. In ancient Phoenicia and Greece there existed lyres producing simultaneously the octave when the main note was plucked (cf. my book, p.421.).

2. I Chron. 15:21 lyres in octaves are mentioned "in order to direct the choir" ; the resonnance of the instrument is thus amplified and justifies the unusual citation.

In Egypt, 2700 B.C., murals in funerary chambers depicting musical ensembles prove that instrumentalists in an ensemble did not execute the same sounds (chironomy scenes)[1]. There is one chironomer per instrumentalist, even two for the harpist[1].

Plato confirms the "varied" styles of instrumental accompaniment : the usage of different melodies on the lyre than that which the poet had composed are exercices which children need not pursue !

David, as an adolescent and famous lyre player, was often called to the footstool of King Saul to calm his apprehensions. We can safely assume that he possessed a highly "varied" style !

Gaudence mentions the "harmonious" character of certain "consonant" intervals. This can only mean the simultaneous sounding of more than one note !

Beautiful melodies require adequate accompaniments. They certainly would not resemble ours today ! We can only safely assume that they were very appropriate, since the Levite musicians were experts in this subject.

x-x-x-x-x

1. Chironomy is the ancient gesturing of the hands which preceded written musical notations which was still in use up to the Middle Ages (cf. my book, Part One, ch.3).

e. WORDS AND PHRASES OF FORGOTTEN MEANING THAT COULD CONCERN MUSIC[1]

Some translators, obviously unacquainted with the beautiful melodi that now resurface, have often proposed doubtful interpretations for expressions found in the headings of certain psalms. These avere to be totally unreliable.

Neither Ayelet hachahar (translated as "the doe of the morning", Ps.22) nor Yonat Elem Rehokim ("the silent dove in the far off", Ps.56) could possibly refer to "the mode" of a known tune ! These expressions connote instruments, no doubt plucked instruments with a veiled, mysterious, plaintive and incisive timbre. We still employ such picturesque expressions as "oboe d'amore".

Al tachhet (Pss. 57,58,59,75) translated as "do not destroy" could, however, refer to instrumental technic. Just like today we say "let vibrate" the psalms with this term are : fervent (Ps.57), supplication (Ps.5 imploring (Ps.59), and very demonstrative (Ps.75). However, other psalms with the same character do not carry this mention !

It is interesting to note that from Ps.88 on there are no further mentions in the psalm headings.

The "Selah".

We wish to make a special paragraph for the word, Selah, which has been given all sorts of hazardous, if not extravagant interpretations, henceforth invalid.

This word is encountered in so many psalms that one need only sing it to comprehend it is an exclamation which underscores the sentiment of the text : "May it finish !". It reacts to both good and bad circumstances, e.g. Pss. 3,24,57.

x-x-x-x

1. Many expressions given in the headings remain and will remain undoubtedly enigmatic. The deciphered music does not help to identify them. The seem to be independant of the music.

f. VOCAL FORMS SUGGESTED BY VARIOUS PSALMS' MELODIES

First of all we inform the reader that generally the superscriptions of the psalms are sung by a solo voice even though we have not indicated them as such. If it happens to be a psalm for soloist, then its heading is sung by the same voice.

A skilled composer is quite capable of sensing if a melody of his is more suited to a solo or an ensemble. In the case of the psalm melodies, accompanying the written text, it is quite normal for a composer to "imagine" the melody in different possible settings for solo voice, choral ensemble or combinations. The composer need only "feel" the effect it would give if one or another form were used.

Certain psalms are a kind of lieder and suit solo voices, e.g., Pss. 23,13,123,137.

Others, always in this melody-word conjunction, imply only a final chorus, e.g., Pss. 27,130,131.

Other solo psalms call for a special form which appears better adapted to two responsorial soloists, e.g., Pss. 1, 114, 124, 126, 129.

Several psalms necessitate the alternation of soloist and chorus, as in Pss. 122, 65, 24 (vv.7-10).

Other texts and music depict antiphonal choirs, like Pss. 96 and 136. The addition of responsorial soloists to antiphonal choirs is found in Ps.19.

Finally and simply, some psalms are best sung by one chorus, e.g., Pss. 93 and 150.

We note that the intervention of a soloist in the middle of a choral psalm (called for by the psalmody itself) often justifies the change to grammatical singular placed in the middle of a general passage. So what bothered translators becomes quite natural in the resurrected melodies ; Pss. 20:7, Ps. 19:12 (anticipated by v.11).

(23) These vocal forms suggested by the psalmody are hardly anachronic for antiquity. Quite the contrary ! The writings that come down to us f Pharaonic Egypt (cf. Hickmann) or Mesopotamia (notably S. Stauder) ment these different vocal forms. The Greeks also make mention of them.

We see from these psalm melodies that in antiquity elaborate compo sitional forms like ours (without modulations as we know them today) we not used. Responsorial vocal forms provided all the variety often called for. The threne (lamentation), a Greek composition of the preclassic period, alternated : (a) the solo, (b) the chorus, (c) the solo and cho (d) the duet (the threne was not accompanied by the lyre but by the flute. Cf. Eschyles, Agamemnon.)

As we can see the vocal forms had a very important function in the music, whether it was sacred or secular in purpose.

g. THE MELODIC FORM OF A PSALM SHAPES ITS POETICAL FORM

Many exegetes have vainly racked their brains to divide the psalms into stiches within the verses, and into strophes within the period. Psa modic poetry has no such bonds. The prayer of thanksgiving and supplica tion is expressed according to its inspiration. Each psalm, however, has a determined "structure", but it is imperceptible in just its written state.

If there are periods, it is the melody which presents them. If there is a continuation, this too is indicated. The melody gives the poem its proper life through melodic finesse, especially at the beginning of vers

The lied : we alluded to this earlier, e.g., Pss. 12, 23, 123, 130, 131 133. The discourse is intimate without distinct periods. It is like this for the longest psalm, Ps. 119. Despite its being divided into eight-verse, acrostical sections, the written message, like the music, transcends this poetic device (a sort of sacred embellishment). Nothing takes away from the psalmist's confidence in His Creator. This Psalm unfolds in piety.

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1. The periods are eloquently indicated by the melody. See especially Ps. 29 as analyzed in my book, pp. 404-406.

Elaborate forms -

An elaborated form for certain psalms is called for by the melodies that animate them. In Pss. 24,118, 29, 149, well defined periods are structured in direct relationship to the written text.

Incipits -

Generally the incipits are imprints of life and feelings. They are sometimes remarkable "antechambers" for the poem (didactic poems, as in Ps. 52). They discretely introduce the action or main thought of the psalm.

Refrains, or rather reprises -

Nowhere in the psalms do we find a refrain as we know it (between couplets of a song). Several psalms repeat the same verse, both textually and musically, later on in the poem. They are a kind of music-words conjugation which engraves itself in our understanding.

Pss. 42, 43, 46, 56, 57, 59, 67, 80, 99 make use of expressive key phrases. Ps. 107 has two phrases which alternate. Some Davidic psalms have similar "refrains", e.g., Ps. 57:6, 12 with 108:6 ; 60:14 with 108:14

The characteristic of psalmody as a whole is diversity for form, move ment and expression. But a study including all 150 Psalms permits some surprising conclusions often unsuspected, but edifying. It brings us to a study of the psalmists themselves.

x-x-x-x-x-x